

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

MR. FAWCETT'S LATEST SATIRE.

SOCIAL SILHOUETTES. (Being the Impressions of Mr. Mark Manhattan.) Edited by EDGAR FAWCETT. 12mo. pp. vi, 308. Ticknor & Co.

The readers of THE TRIBUNE have already enjoyed these vigorous sketches, originally contributed to our columns, and they will be glad to have them now in a shape suitable for preservation. There are few of Mr. Fawcett's writings which better deserve a place in the library. Although their form is that of short, disconnected studies, they constitute in reality the most serious and carefully considered of the author's attacks upon that circle of New-York society of which he has constituted himself the censor. Never has this country beheld an aspect of fashionable life which deserved a more savage ridicule, and never have our social frivolities and shams been scourged with a more cutting lash. Mr. Fawcett seems to have found his chance. In his early novels there was perhaps a lack of definite purpose. He was suspected—perhaps unjustly—of burlesquing real persons with too slight a sense of responsibility and too keen a sense of the market value of his experiences. But here he has reached the high level of the genuine satirist who exhibits types rather than individuals, and turns the laugh of scorn against the vices of a community without looking into private lives. Of course the gossips who are never happy but in derision of their friends will fancy that they recognize portraits in more than one of Mr. Fawcett's "Silhouettes"; but that cannot be helped. The real merit of the sketches is that they are accurate descriptions, not of exceptional persons, but of classes large enough to give a distinct tone to the society in which they figure. When we read such admirable papers as "The Young Gentleman who Succeeds," or "A Typical New-York Man," or "A Nephew of Mine," we do not try to identify any model of the collection of scenes which we catch in the streets, the clubs, the cafes and the drawing-rooms of New-York must be painfully familiar. In the best of his papers Mr. Fawcett stirs up with the accents of a generous and burning indignation; and it is a part of the secret of his strength at such times that he has gone deeper than the surface follies of society, and has discerned the reaction of fashion upon character. He is not castigating then the affectations and absurdities which we shall live to be ashamed of, but the mean habits of mind which imperil our whole future.

Of New-York society in general he expresses his judgment in no measured terms. New-York, he declares, is "the most unrefined city in proportion to its size and civilization, that has probably ever existed." It is "about as positively snobbish a city as the globe possesses." "Any man whose life has chiefly been passed in the haunts of New-York circles may be said to possess a meagre experience of educated people." His gallery of specimens is certainly well chosen to illustrate this sweeping description. He does not concern himself wholly, or even very largely, with the new-made rich whose ostentation is a constant theme of ridicule; his favorite victims are the Knickerbocker families and other people of "blue blood" who pride themselves upon ancestral gentility. None of his men and women are more offensively vulgar than those who have an inherited right to know better. It is obvious that in his American circle of caste he carries his denunciation of a class much too far; yet there is a broad foundation of truth even for his most cruel exaggerations. It is impossible to lash snobbery, ignorance, mean ambition, coarse display and rude manners in New-York society without hitting a great many of the "best people." Good breeding is the product of character no less than of association; and that the character of our entire population has been more or less unfavorably affected by the rapid growth of an aristocracy of more wealth no careful observer will deny.

The case, however, is not so hopeless as Mr. Fawcett seems to think. He denies us the palliation of youth which is so often pleaded for our deficiencies. A century, says his Mark Manhattan, is a great deal for a nation like ours. We were never born in a more civilized age. "We had no language to develop, no barbarism to civilize, no feudalism to break down. Our one century should have been what five were to ancient Rome. We had nothing to live down and everything to live up to. Socially we had uncounted European blunders to atone for and keep us on our guard." And therefore he believes we ought to have exhibited long ago a splendid example of culture and refinement. But culture and refinement are not acquired by developing free political institutions and studying European blunders. The graces and elegance of life, the love of art and literature, the science of social intercourse, the hundred amenities and accomplishments which distinguish a ripe civilization, are only found in their fullest among communities where there has long flourished a large class of men of leisure. Hitherto nearly everybody in this country has worked hard all his life, the rich men as hard as the rest; and leisure has been thought scarcely respectable. But a change has already begun. The number of those who stop work before the day is long has been lost the capacity for enjoying life is becoming larger. The idle class will not long be satisfied with frivolous and demoralizing amusements; and the best of them will naturally seek the company of the leaders in professional and public life and of those active men of affairs who have never allowed business to absorb them. It is out of this combination that we may look for social culture.

In the meantime he is a most unfortunate New-Yorker who does not know how to live in this feverish city where every refinement of good manners and education has always ruled; where hospitality is graced by the gentleness of women and the most courteous of men; where bright, intelligent and cheerful people gather around the table; where conversation touches upon high themes without pedantry, and plays about the trifles of life without impertinence or folly. He is unfortunate who cannot recall entertainments at which it was a privilege to sit, and table-talk which for wit, delicacy and a wide range of knowledge could with difficulty be surpassed in any capital of the world. Mr. Fawcett has not described such houses. It is curious that he rarely sketches educated men and women without allowing himself to fall into travesty. Even his Mark Manhattan, the cool and satirical observer of the "Silhouettes," is a deplorable failure when he gets upon what Mr. Fawcett must allow us to call his "fad," namely, Herbert Spencer and evolution; and the discussion between Mark and Mr. Crip recorded in "The Gentleman who is Glib," is a wisp of smoke which hardly has taken place at a respectable dinner-table. Nevertheless though it may not be the business of the satirist to see it, there is a circle of highly educated and accomplished and agreeable people among us, whose society illustrates the best conditions of the "gentle life," and, heaven be praised! it is not a small one.

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MRS. SALISBURY'S SCHOOL.—No. 4 East 58th-st., facing Central Park, will re-open on Thursday, September 24.

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